

March 10, 1959

Dr. Ralph A. Lewin
Marine Biological Laboratory
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

Dear Ralph:

I had of course heard of the Sukachev affair from the newspapers but have not seen any of the primary sources.

On the whole, I myself think that the action you contemplate would be at best futile and might well do more harm than good to the personalities involved. Our relations with the U.S.S.R., both political and scientific, have rarely been worse than at the present time and any support of Sukachev from a Western source might merely reinforce the Lysenko position. You should not think that the members of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences are naive and any action of this kind must reflect some profound political machinations that scientific remarks are quite unlikely to influence. If Lysenko is coming to power again I am sure it will not be because he has convinced any responsible group of scientists of the validity of his views but rather because of the political connections that he represents. In any case I am certain that the Academy would be quite insensitive to any private representations of the kind you contemplate.

The action in the U.S.S.R. speaks for itself sufficiently that I would think the best course is to accept it as an accomplished fact. However, I can see how there might be some point to keeping the issue alive by way of a public statement from interested botanists and geneticists.

For the moment I would prefer not to associate myself with such a public statement, which I don't think will really be very effective, and not for lack of sympathy with the objective. I do anticipate the possibility of having to deal with members of the Russian Academy in connection with the problem of planetary contamination and if so it would be better not to embarrass my correspondents by too dramatic an association with anti-U.S.S.R. statements.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics